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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains five essays designed to help parents raise confident, competent daughters. They focus on ways that parents can help their preadolescent and adolescent daughters: (1) speak up in class, articulate their thoughts, and speak with self-confidence in various academic and social situations; (2) develop an interest and aptitude for mathematics and science; (3) develop healthy peer relationships during the transition through adolescence; (4) participate in sports that allow them to develop physical fitness, determination, self-esteem, strategic thinking, and teamwork; and (5) develop self-esteem and self-confidence through discussions of gender roles and stereotypes portrayed in the family, literature, the mass media, and school. Specific activities that parents can undertake with their daughters are presented. (MDM)

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Raising Confident, Competent Daughters

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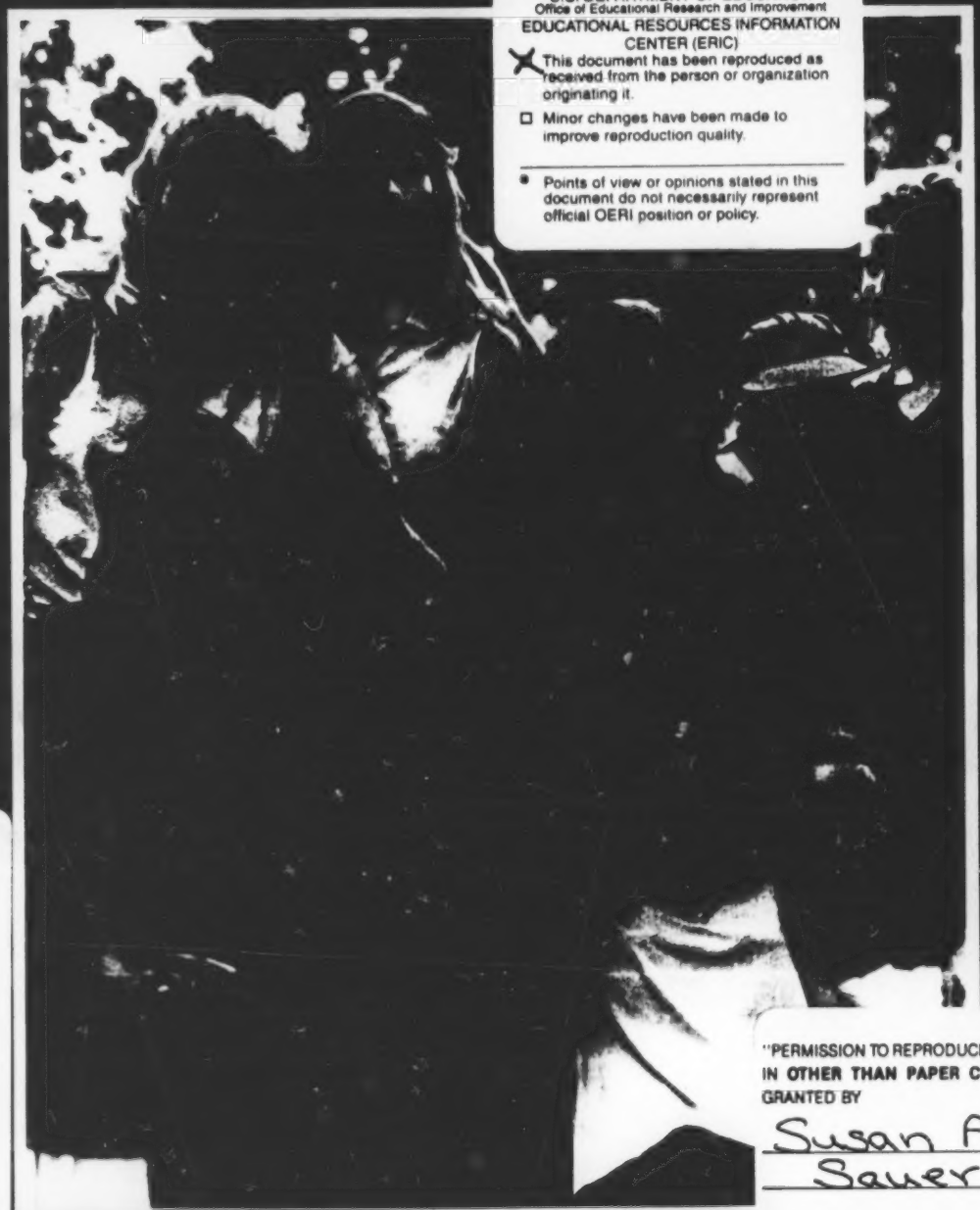

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Strategies for Parents

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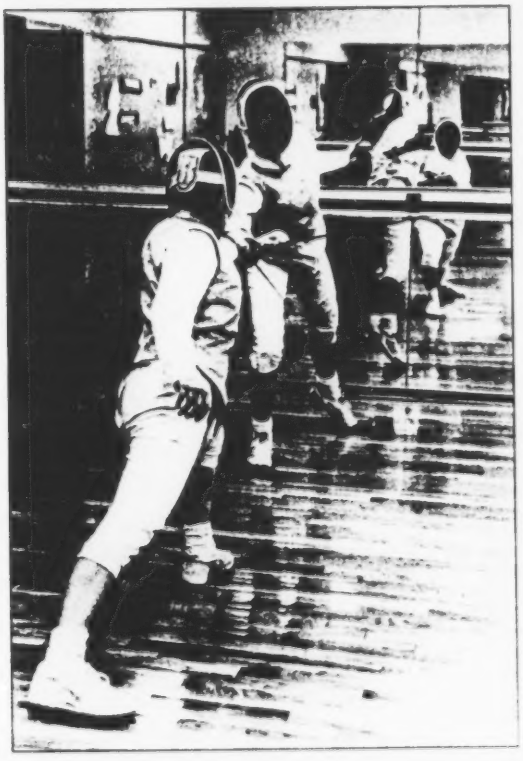

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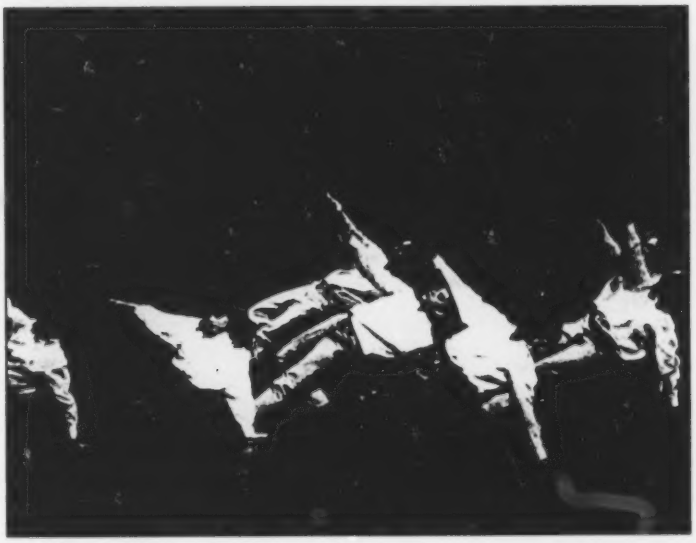
An Introduction

Raising Confident, Competent Daughters: Strategies for Parents

A JOB DESCRIPTION FOR PARENTS! Wouldn't we all like to have one! Being a good parent is one of the most difficult (and rewarding) jobs we will ever have. In light of recent research and classroom observations, raising a confident, competent daughter presents a particular set of challenges to both parents and educators. We, like you, believe fervently that every girl deserves the chance to realize her many possibilities. It's a lifelong process, and it begins early.

Parents and educators should be partners in this process. The essays within this booklet represent the beginning of such a partnership. Five heads of girls' schools, who collectively work with thousands of girls as they learn and grow, offer some simple and powerful strategies to help you in the important work that you are doing. Their expertise mirrors that of countless others working in all-girls schools.

Together we can make a difference!



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Finding Her Voice

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My Daughter and Sports

Being All She Can Be

EDITORS

Whitney Ransome
Meg Milne Moulton
National Coalition of Girls' Schools
Concord, Massachusetts

Elaine Morgan Levit
Anne E. Rosenfeld
Public Information Resources, Inc.
Boston, Massachusetts

• • •

CONTRIBUTORS

Margaret Broad
St. Margaret's School

Barbara Wagner
Marlborough School

Patricia Hayot
Columbus School for Girls

Rebecca Upham
The Ellis School

Edes Gilbert
The Spence School

• • •

PHOTOGRAPHY

Cover: Foxcroft School
Back cover: La Pietra - Hawaii School for Girls
Interior: Columbus School for Girls, Dana Hall School, The Ellis School, The Ethel Walker School, Greenwich Academy, Hathaway Brown School, Marian Heights Academy, Stuart Country Day School of the Sacred Heart

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DESIGNER
Sara Lennon

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Sue Sauer

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Finding Her Voice

Helping Your Daughter Speak Up With Confidence

Learning to articulate thoughts and feelings goes hand in hand with developing self-confidence.

As girls grow and develop, their voices need to be encouraged. Learning to articulate thoughts and feelings goes hand-in-hand with developing self-confidence. Do you know whether your daughter speaks up in class? Is she comfortable disagreeing and dissenting? Is she encouraged to express herself clearly and openly? Does she share her thoughts and feelings with you, other adults, and peers?

According to a 1990 poll conducted by the American Association of University Women, as girls enter into adolescence, they lose self-esteem more readily than boys, and thus the confidence needed to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Developmental psychologists Carol Gilligan and Lyn Mikel Brown speak about the connection between girls' images of self and girls' voices in a book entitled *Meeting at the Crossroads* (Harvard University Press, 1992). What can you do to help your daughter develop a strong sense of self and therefore gain a strong voice?

Get To Know Your Daughter's Schooling Experience

- **Talk to your daughter's teachers.** Find out if they encourage your daughter to speak up and be heard in the classroom. Does she respond readily to teachers' questions? Does she initiate discussion? Does she take an assertive role in group work? Does she express what she is thinking and feeling?
- **Ask your daughter's teachers to describe her.** Comments such as, "She is a nice, quiet, conscientious girl," should raise a red flag. Your daughter is probably not speaking up in class or her teacher is not expecting enough. Make sure that her teachers concentrate more on the attainment of skills and refinement of talent, and less on appearance, peer assessment, or "ladylike" behavior.
- **Be aware of teaching styles used in the classroom.** Research shows that girls learn best in classrooms where competitive and collaborative learning styles are blended, and where the traditional use of relying on lecturing, listening, and imitating is avoided or limited. Find out how many opportunities your daughter has to participate in small-group projects and discussions, and to learn by using a hands-on approach.

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Open Lines of Communication at Home

- **Build family communication as early as possible,** preferably before your daughter enters adolescence. Establishing open lines of communication early on will pave the way for better communication as adolescence sets in, a time when parents and daughters often have more trouble seeing eye-to-eye. Whenever possible, look for ways to develop mutual interests and to share activities with your daughter.
- **Listen to your daughter without criticizing her.** Let your daughter know her thoughts, feelings, and experiences are important to you. Don't be afraid to probe gently and ask, "What do you think?" or "How do you feel?" You may not always hear the answer that you want, but it is important that you encourage your daughter to give honest answers and say how she really feels. Remember, if you truly respect your daughter's thoughts and feelings, she will grow to respect herself.
- **Structure family activities, including family meals, around conversation.** This will help keep the lines of communication open in times of confrontation. Listen carefully to conversations you share with your daughter. Do not be judgmental. Rather, respond logically and calmly.

Explore Community Opportunities

- **Reach out into the community.** Get your daughter involved in children's programs at local museums, at the YWCA, at church groups, or in other organizations. Mixing with other peers and adults outside of school gives girls greater confidence in social settings.
- **Join community sports organizations.** Sports teach girls the skills of teamwork, competition, and motivation. These will contribute to your daughter's sense of physical well-being, her ability to express herself, and to take the initiative in many other areas of life.
- **Encourage your daughter to get involved** in public service/volunteer opportunities or part-time jobs if she is old enough. Opportunities for girls to work with others and to talk about jobs and responsibilities are important in establishing role models and building aspirations.

Through relationships, schoolwork, and community experiences, girls can actively learn to explore their feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Encourage your daughter to know that her own experiences are relevant, valid, and meaningful. In order to develop confidence and a strong voice, your daughter must learn to accept and love herself. Helping your daughter to do so is one of the greatest gifts you can give to her.

It is important that you encourage your daughter to give honest answers and say how she really feels.

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My Daughter, The Physicist?

Cultivating your Daughter's Love of Math and Science

How can you help your daughter sustain an interest in math and science?

If you are the parent of an elementary or junior high school daughter who loves math and science, there is much you can do to encourage her to maintain an interest in these subjects. As children progress through school, it is natural for them to favor certain subjects over others; however, research has shown that boys maintain a greater interest in math and science than do girls.

Among high school students today, girls comprise only 30% of students in chemistry and 15% of students in physics. Though the gap in mathematics is closing, you may have heard about girls scoring less well on standardized tests of mathematics and taking fewer math courses than boys. You may wonder whether your daughter, who loves mathematics and science now, will lose her passion for them.

Why are girls discouraged from these subjects? From the earliest years of school, many girls receive subtle messages from teachers and peers that math and science are boys' fields. How can you help your daughter sustain an interest in math and science?

Encourage Your Daughter in Math and Science At Home

- **Consider your own feelings about math and science.** Were these subjects easy for you or did you struggle with them? Even if these subjects were hard for you, do not impose your feelings on your daughter. Focus on *her* enthusiasm, interest, and talent.
- **Support your daughter's interest in math and science.** Keep expectations high. Children are natural scientists because of their inquisitiveness. Urge your daughter to look at her surroundings. Encourage her to think about how bridges and skyscrapers are constructed, or how rainbows are formed.
- **Find a mentor for your daughter,** whether another family member or an adult friend, with whom she can "talk shop." Arrange for her to visit professional working environments such as a chemistry laboratory or an architecture firm.

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- **Engage her in projects that develop spatial reasoning and analytical skills.** Girls ten and older may enjoy tinkering with a chemistry set or building a model robot from a kit. If you are a fix-it-yourselfer, ask your daughter if she would like to help with projects around the house. For younger children, there are many books of fun at-home science activities for parents and kids such as *Helping Your Child Learn Science*. This book can be ordered from the U.S. Department of Education at (202) 512-1800.
- **Get your daughter's peers involved.** Find out which friends also enjoy math and science. Design a birthday party for your daughter with a science theme and invite her friends. Hold a star-gazing party at night. Go to the science museum. Organize a building project.

Math and Science At School

- **Ask your daughter's teachers about specific math and science projects.** Express interest in your daughter's progress. Find out what computer programs, materials, and equipment are available for her use and how often she uses them.
- **Discuss teaching styles with your daughter's teachers.** Are classes taught in a lecture-listen-imitate format? Cognitive psychology has shown that girls learn better in classrooms with small group discussion, dialogue, and individual student presentations. These methods can be applied to math and science learning. Teachers should use real-life examples and metaphors that are meaningful to girls.
- **Help your daughter interpret her success.** Make sure she knows that her willingness to work hard at these subjects will pay off. Encourage her to take mathematics and science classes and hold high expectations for her success.
- **Ask the school library to sponsor a display of female mathematicians and scientists who have excelled in their fields.** It is critical that girls see themselves in these roles. Volunteer to take photographs of girls peering through microscopes and handling test tubes during science classes and then suggest that the pictures be included in the display.

- **Ask if your daughter's school offers special math and science programs or workshops.** Some schools complement their curricula by hosting math and science programs sponsored by independent organizations such as the National Talent Network, MathCounts, and the Junior Engineering Technical Society. Check to see if your daughter's school hosts one of these programs. If not, encourage her school to get involved.

Math and Science in Your Community

- **Support and participate in your community organizations that sponsor enrichment programs in math and science.** Check with your local colleges; girls' organizations, such as the Girl Scouts; and museums. Some programs are national in scope. *Science by Mail*, for example, is a nationwide education outreach program sponsored by the Museum of Science in Boston. Through the program, children in grades four through nine are matched up with adult scientists who act as pen-pals, role models, and mentors. The contact number for this program is (800) 729-3300.

Math and science can be gateway subjects for future career choices. Stand by your daughter as she comes to value their importance.

Urge your daughter to look at her surroundings. Encourage her to think about how bridges and skyscrapers are constructed, or how rainbows are formed.

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The Power of Peers

Surviving Your Daughter's Passion for the Phone

Your daughter's time on the phone with friends may actually be a good thing, and here's why.

DO YOU EVER WONDER WHY your teenage daughter spends so much time on the phone? Do you wonder whether it is good for her? Do you worry that communication with your daughter has diminished, just as it increases with her friends? Your daughter's time on the phone with friends may actually be a good thing, and here's why.

As girls enter adolescence, they embark on a new journey of peer relationships. Social scientists and psychologists have suggested that a collaborative and cooperative peer culture is important to girls and that girls understand themselves through their relationships with others. As girls draw closer to friends, they often become less emotionally dependent on parents. This is a natural process. In recognizing this, you can support your daughter and strengthen your own relationship with her.

Growing Up: The Changing Dynamics of Relationships

From the ages of 12 or 13, most girls begin developing a keen sense of social awareness. Many girls approach peer relationships unreservedly. Circulating among friends in a "pack" mentality, they form social circles and cliques easily. By 13 or 14, many girls begin to test friendships. Friendships break up and are formed more readily. A friend today may not be one tomorrow. The phone is a tool by which girls can talk about all aspects of these relationships.

Girls at 15 or 16 learn how to appreciate being alone as they draw back from some relationships; they are often more introspective, moodier, and choose to explore solitary activities such as guitar playing. Increasing academic pressures may make girls at this age more serious about learning to study alone and experience self-discovery. Though preoccupied with issues of independence, girls are still highly sensitive to peer interaction.

By ages 16 or 17, girls approach friendships in a more mature way. They learn to appreciate people for their individual talents and personalities. The clique mentality fades further away as girls gradually make the transition from dependence, to independence, to interdependence.

Growing Up: Asserting Independence

As they move through these various stages, many girls learn to wean themselves from reliance on their parents. Unfortunately, for many

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families, adolescence is a time of broken communication and fragmentation among parents and daughters. Understanding that it is natural for girls to rely more on peers and less on parents for emotional support will help you appreciate that your daughter's development is natural and on track.

As a parent, what kind of approach should you take toward your daughter's peer relationships? How can you maintain healthy lines of communication with her?

Eight Steps For Parents

- **Allow your daughter to explore relationships on her own.** Girls need to learn for themselves what it means to establish and sustain friendships.
- **Recognize that friendships for adolescent girls are a sacred domain.** Girls may not tell their parents everything, but they do tell their friends everything. Don't be alarmed if your daughter shares her thoughts and feelings less with you now than when she was younger.
- **Understand that the phone is an important tool for your daughter.** It allows her to navigate more easily through her relationships with peers.
- **Take advantage of the phone to encourage studying.** Suggest to your daughter that she find a "phone study-buddy" with whom she can discuss ideas and homework assignments.
- **Know that some "social engineering" is appropriate, but tread gently.** Encourage your daughter to mix with different people of different ages. Suggest that she invite someone different to the movies than she did last time, but don't push too much.
- **Recognize that you don't always need to stage great social occasions.** Encourage her to hang out and watch a movie with her friends or go bowling with them. Relaxed time is as important as programmed time.
- **Understand that you will not always see eye to eye with your daughter.** That's OK. She is developing as an individual, separate from you. This will strengthen her self-esteem and self-reliance.
- **Decide and discuss ahead of time with your daughter the ground rules regarding friendships.** Though you should not try to control her social agenda, you need to establish guidelines with which you are comfortable as a parent. For instance, if staying out past midnight is not all right, you need to discuss this ahead of time and then make it stick.

Parents need to give their daughters room to grow. Let your daughter explore the exciting but sometimes difficult maze of peer relationships. In doing so, you will improve your relationship with your daughter and help her gain valuable insights on self-reliance, interdependence, and friendship.

Parents need to give daughters room to grow. Let her explore the exciting but sometimes difficult maze of peer relationships.

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My Daughter And Sports

A Winning Combination

In losing, girls learn not to fault themselves but to change their strategy. On the field or in the gym, girls discover that problem-solving contributes to success.

TWELVE YEAR OLD ANGIE STOOD at the center of the basketball court facing her opponent, her legs bent slightly and ready to spring up at the sound of the whistle. Her eyes stared anxiously at the ball held high in front of her. Her friend Sarah called out, "C'mon Angie. Go for it." The whistle blew and both girls jumped as high as they could to reach the ball. Armed with agility and determination, Angie hit the ball firmly into her teammates' hands.

At her tender age, Angie is learning important lifetime skills and habits through her participation in sports: motivation, self-confidence, how to win and lose, how to compete, how to work with others, and how to assess and surpass limitations.

Even today, some girls are discouraged from playing sports because it is "unladylike"; however, sports teach skills that cannot be gained in English or math class, and thus it is important that girls participate in them as much as boys.

In their recently published book *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* (Scribners, 1994), authors David and Myra Sadker write about a study in which boys were asked to describe what it would be like to be a girl. Boys perceived the female body as "fragile, limited, and incompetent, especially in athletics and sports." Correspondingly, girls felt limited in sports because of their gender.

Girls' sports help to level the gender playing field, so to speak, and teach girls lessons that can be applied to all areas of life. After all, many skills learned on the basketball court can be applied to the executive boardroom.

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What Your Daughter Can Gain from Sports

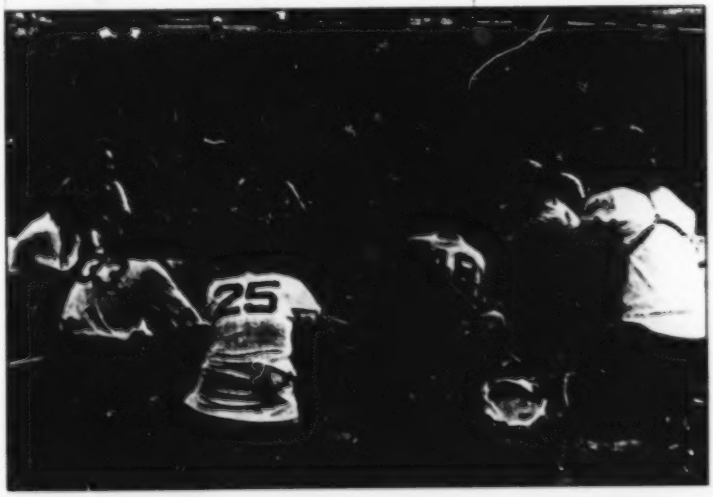
- **Physical fitness**: Sports develop girls' strength, flexibility, balance, and body control — whether by serving a tennis ball, walking the balance beam, tossing the javelin, or shooting a basket.
- **Determination and perseverance**: Sports teach girls how to push beyond and transcend limitations — both physically and mentally.
- **Self-esteem and confidence**: Sports bring positive self-images to girls while their bodies grow and change. During adolescence, it is normal for girls to gain extra pounds, at a time when they are often influenced by unrealistic images of females in the media. Being active helps girls control their weight and feel more at peace with their bodies.
- **Strategic thinking**: Sports teach girls that winning and losing are equally valuable experiences. In losing, girls learn not to fault themselves but to change their strategy. On the field or in the gym, girls discover that problem-solving contributes to success.
- **Interdependence**: Team sports teach girls how to be self-reliant while drawing upon the strengths of others. Girls learn how to ask for and give help to teammates. They learn how to work competitively and collaboratively.

How You Can Inspire Your Daughter's Love of Sports

- **Cultivate interest as early as possible**. Some parents enroll toddlers in swimming programs at their local community sports centers.
- **Encourage her to participate** in sports at school or in the community with the local Girl Scouts, YWCA, church and community groups.
- **Express interest in her athletic programs and activities**. Whenever possible, show your support by attending after school games and other extracurricular sports programs.
- **Make sports fun** by designing parties with an athletic theme, such as a volleyball and pizza party.
- **Be active yourself**. By example, you show your daughter the value and pleasure of athletic pursuits.
- **Celebrate National Girls and Women in Sports Day each February**. Contact the National Association for Girls and Women in Sports at (703) 476-3450 for more information.

Your attitude, enthusiasm, and encouragement make a real difference!

Team sports teach girls how to be self-reliant while drawing upon the strengths of others. Girls learn how to work competitively and collaboratively.



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Being All She Can Be

Encouraging Your Daughter's Self-esteem

Parents have enormous influence over girls' perception of themselves and their world.

As a parent of a daughter, you may notice that many girls tend to suffer a decline in how they feel about themselves as they pass from childhood into womanhood. Girls at age fourteen often are more insecure than they were at age eight. Yet educational and developmental research has shown that boys generally maintain or even improve their self-esteem in their teens. Why does this happen? Will it happen to your daughter?

Psychologists studying the influence of gender on development have presented research demonstrating that the experience of boys and girls is significantly different. Male developmental psychology has often stressed boys' need to learn independence and autonomy while researchers, such as Carol Gilligan of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, have shown that girls, by nature, are collaborative, cooperative, interdependent, and relationally oriented. Though social scientists have contributed to our understanding of how girls develop, social structures have not changed to accommodate these findings. Many institutions continue to measure girls' development against the yardstick for that of boys; in addition, some even reinforce stereotypes that lower girls' perceptions of self.

For most children, parents are the strongest and most direct role models girls have on which to base their own aspirations and identities. Parents have enormous influence over girls' perceptions of themselves and their world.

How To Help Your Daughter Maintain a Healthy Self-image

- **Encourage her to talk or write about critical passages in her life as they unfold.** Be aware that it is important for girls to understand and articulate experiences from their own perspectives. While listening, try to suspend judgment; ask probing questions that prompt your daughter to reflect on her experiences and make her own judgments about them. Many girls are strengthened by recording experiences in a diary and by finding a close friend or friends with whom to share thoughts and feelings.

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- **Let her know that she has the power to say what she thinks.** Encourage her to articulate and defend her point of view. Let her have a voice. Encourage her to use assertive language. Listen for such statements as, "This is a stupid question but...." and help your daughter realize how these phrases negatively affect the listener and the self.

- **Analyze your own perceptions of gender roles.** Do you think your son is more mechanical than your daughter, simply on the basis of gender rather than experience? Changing traditional perceptions of gender roles can help shape your daughter's sense of confidence and self-worth. If you have followed traditional patterns, try role-changing. Encourage your son to do the laundry and your daughter to help repair the light switch. Convince your daughter to complete tasks independently and to be resourceful. Many parents give their daughters more help than their sons for the same activities. The unintended message is, "You can't figure this out by yourself."

- **Help your daughter become a media critic,** so she can identify and analyze stereotypical roles in the media. At your breakfast or dinner table, discuss what your family is watching on television or in the movies. The media is loaded with messages saying females should be pretty rather than smart. Talk about how characters can reinforce damaging stereotypes. Assist your daughter in learning to sort out fantasy from reality. Problems that are frequently identified with girls, such as eating disorders, often come from girls' desire to fit in with popular but unrealistic notions of beauty.

- **Select and encourage books that feature positive role models and mentoring figures.** Counter gender stereotypes in books that diminish a sense of self. If you're familiar with the books your daughter is reading, discuss characters and lives with her. Several excellent books for girls that present a realistic and positive view of the female experience are: *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* by Avi, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Virginia Hamilton, *The Girl with the White Flag* by Tomiko Higa, and *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen.

- **Stay in close touch with her schooling experiences.** Make sure that your daughter is actively speaking up in class and is held to high expectations academically by her teachers. Find out how many opportunities your daughter has to play sports or learn leadership skills. Discuss the school environment with school leaders. Is there sexist behavior? Does your daughter ever feel she is put down on the basis of her gender? Help your daughter recognize these feelings, and learn not to write them off but to speak out about them.

As a parent, you can help to bolster your daughter's sense of self so that she will more readily accept challenges, take risks, and reach her highest potential.

Though social scientists have contributed to our understanding of how girls develop, social structures have not changed to accommodate these findings.

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The National Coalition of Girls' Schools

THE NATIONAL COALITION OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS is an organization of seventy-five girls' boarding and day, private and public schools from across the United States with affiliates in Canada and Australia. While differing in history, tradition, location, academic rigor, extra-curriculars, religious affiliation, size, and philosophy, Coalition members share a commitment to the values and advantages of an all-girls school. To that end, the organization has collected and conducted research on gender issues; surveyed member school alumnae, parents, and prospective families; sponsored national forums for leading girls' and women's groups; gathered comparative institutional data; and sponsored the *Math & Science for Girls*, *Girls & the Physical Sciences*, and *Girls & Technology* symposia.

We,
like
you,
fervently
believe
that every
girl
deserves
the chance
to realize
her many
possibilities.
It's a
lifelong
process,
and it
begins
early.

For a directory of girls' schools nationwide or further information about the Coalition's publications, conferences, or research, call or write:

Meg Milne Moulton or Whitney Ransome
Executive Directors
The National Coalition of Girls' Schools
228 Main Street
Concord, Massachusetts 01742
Phone & Fax: 508-287-4485
Internet: ncgs@delphi.com

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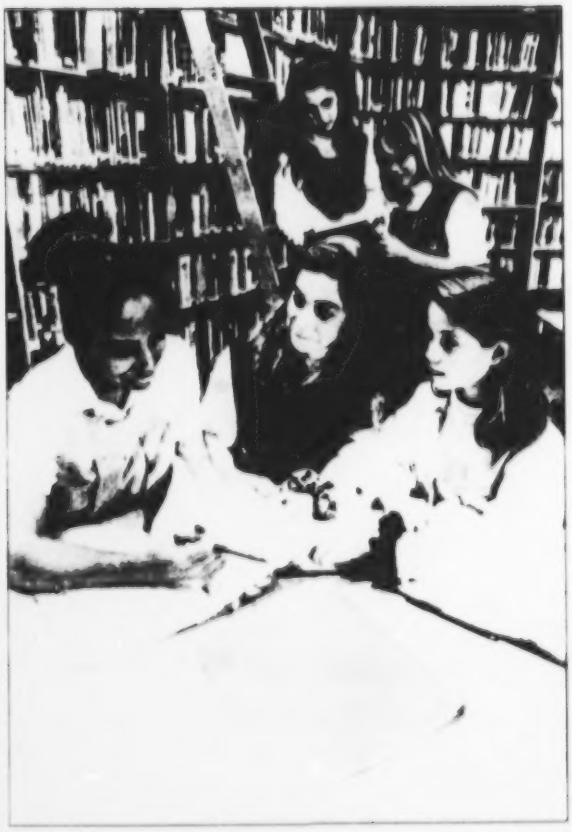

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THE NATIONAL COALITION OF GIRLS SCHOOLS

228 MAIN STREET

CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01742

(508) 287-4185

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